

Western Kentucky University
TopSCHOLAR®

Student/Alumni Personal Papers

WKU Archives Records

1-1-1974

UA94/6/1 Ercell Jane Egbert: An Appreciation

Bill Weaver

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_alum_papers

Recommended Citation

Weaver, Bill, "UA94/6/1 Ercell Jane Egbert: An Appreciation" (1974). *Student/Alumni Personal Papers*. Paper 32.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_alum_papers/32

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student/Alumni Personal Papers by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact connie.foster@wku.edu.

Ercell Egbert

Historians have given a variety of titles to the recounting of their careers in their careers in historical profession: John D. Hicks, *My Life With History*, Roy Nichols, *A historian's Progress*, Dexter Perkins, *Yield of the Years*, and Thomas D. Clark, "Growing Up With the Frontier." None of these titles completely describes the forty-year professional career of Ercell Jan Egbert, who taught at Western Kentucky University from its days as Western Kentucky State Normal School and Teachers College to shortly after it achieved university status. During those four decades, she instructed by Miss Egbert was a privilege, though not always recognized as such, and to have succeeded in her class was an honor to be cherished.

Ercell Jane Egbert, the second of Hise and Cora Egbert's seven children, was born on October 22, 1895, at Farmersville, a small Kentucky community in Caldwell County. Her father, a local Baptist minister, apparently placed considerable emphasis on education, as five of the children prepared to teach. She attended grade school at Farmersville, and in the spring of 1914 enrolled at Western Kentucky State Normal School in Bowling Green, where she completed her high school work. Her pursuit of a degree at Western was interrupted by teaching stints in Kentucky at the rural school at Liberty (1914-16), Farmersville High School (1916-1918), Burkesville High School (1920), special classes for World War I veterans at Western in the spring of 1922, and at Lakeland High School in Florida (1923).

Upon completion of her B.A. degree in 1925, Dr. A.M. Stickles employed Miss Egbert to join his small staff as a history teacher at Western. Felling the need for advanced training, she enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania in 1928, completing the M.A. degree in 1930. NO doubt her persistence in pursuit of the elusive detail impressed her professors. Years afterward, she would recount with justifiable pride the fact that persistence at the Library of Congress had enabled her to uncover an important but previously undiscovered speech which one of her professors later used as an important verifying document in a book. Her masters thesis, a carefully researched study entitled: "Kentucky's Interest in Pacific Railroad Questions, 1830-1865," represented her only formal historical writing. Even though she enrolled for advanced graduate study in fall of 1943 at the University of Chicago and in the summer of 1945 at Indian University, Miss Egbert did not pursue an additional degree, but she established lifelong friendships with some of her professors at these institutions.

Despite Miss Egbert's dearth of publications, her research never ceased. She constantly worked to increase library holdings, especially in English history, and she was a dedicated member of Western's first Faculty Research Committee. She had an inquisitive mind and demanded of her students the "how" and "why" of historical events. Her research was the most unselfish kind; it was for immediate use in the classroom. She never reviewed lecture notes before going to class, and for good reason ---she had none. Yet she never entered class unprepared and, unhappily for many, she expected the same of her students. To her, a sign of insufficient preparation was copious note taking in class; thus, note taking in Miss Ebert's class was a luxury permitted only upon daily proof that the student was fully prepared. Although she never came to class armed with anything more than a coin purse or office keys, she had outlined in her mind what she hoped to cover, followed that mental outline diligently, and reluctantly dismissed the class long after the bell had rung.

Her specific field was English history, but over the years Miss Egbert taught a number of other courses with equal dedication. She was a voracious reader of history and her reading was often in primary sources, prompting her to send students scurrying to Hansard's Parliamentary Debates or similar sources in search of a point. Her study of the Bible

paralleled her study of history, and she taught Sunday School classes and youth groups at her church for many years.

Many Western students who have achieved success has doctors, lawyers, ministers, public school teachers and administrators, university teachers and administrators, as well as persons in other fields, attribute much of their success to the rigorous training which they received at the hands of this dedicate scholar-teacher. These students recognized her contribution to their success, and she, in turn, took great pride in them.

During her retirement years (1966-74) Miss Egbert continued to be a learner, visiting for the first time the various geographical areas upon which she had spent an entire career of serious study. Miss Egbert died on Christmas morning, 1974, but her spirit as a student of history as a devoted teacher lives on through the many who were privileged to have known her.